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Former Carter Aide Speaks Out

Stand by U.S. on Hostages Assailed

By R. GREGORY NOKES, Associated Press

WASHINGTON—A "mad as hell" Hodding Carter III wishes President Jimmy Carter's Administration had handled the kidnaping of Americans the way the Reagan Administration has, saying nothing that would reveal the United States is "utterly impotent" to force their release.

The Carter Administration's credibility suffered a grievous blow because its agonizing public efforts to free the 53 American hostages in Iran failed, while Reagan has remained virtually silent—without hurting his image—on the plight of five Americans being held hostage in Lebanon.

"I'm bitter about it," said Carter, who was the State Department spokesman during most of the long Iranian hostage ordeal. "This Administration has proved itself to be utterly impotent, and they are getting away with it because they refuse to talk about it."

5 Hostages Named

The five being held in Lebanon are: Jeremy Levin, a correspondent for Cable News Network; William Buckley, an American diplomat; the Rev. Benjamin Wier, a Presbyterian minister; Peter Kilburn, a librarian at American University in Beirut and the Father Lawrence Jenco, head of Catholic Relief Services in Beirut.

The kidnapers are apparently demanding that all Americans leave Lebanon. They also apparently want the release of the suspected terrorists being held in Kuwait for the 1983 bombing of the American embassy and other installations there. Lately, they have threatened to put the five Americans on trial as subversives.

Although rejecting the terrorists' demands, the Administration has said virtually nothing about efforts to free them, a sharp contrast to Carter's response to Iranian hostage-taking. During Jimmy Carter's hostage crisis yellow ribbons were put on trees, the national Christmas tree was kept dark and the President delayed campaigning for his party's nomination for reelection, although he won it anyway.

"If I were to do it all over again, I would do it that way," said Hodding Carter III, referring to the Reagan approach. But he said, "I'm mad as hell" that Reagan, who criticized Carter over Iran, is himself escaping criticism when the end result is no different.

"They are still being held," he said in an interview. "One approach is not working better than the other." He also said the Reagan approach of "quiet diplomacy" may mean that nothing is being done, although Administration officials dispute this.

The Administration's silence has extended even to concealing the fact that a videotape picturing three of the Americans was received at the State Department last July. A second videotape of one of the hostages was received Monday by Visnews, a British television news agency.

A State Department terrorist expert confirmed that a first tape had been received in July and that a decision was made not to publicize it, although he said families of

the victims were notified.

"We didn't want to repeat the mistakes made during the Iranian hostage-taking," said the official, who spoke on condition he not be identified. "The Carter Administration made such an issue of it that Iran kept raising the price. The less noise we make about it this time, the lower the price."

He also said the kidnapers obviously want publicity, and denying it may discourage future incidents.

Actions and Rhetoric

Reagan's handling of the Lebanon kidnapings also contrasts his actions with his rhetoric. Reagan had promised on Jan. 27, 1981—at a ceremony welcoming the hostages home from Iran—that the United States would not tolerate such terrorist abuses in his Administration.

"Let the terrorists beware that when the rules of international behavior are violated, our policy will be one of swift and effective retribution," Reagan declared. He

repeated his threats of retaliation after several of the terrorist bombings of American facilities in Beirut that killed hundreds of Americans.

But there never has been retaliation. Subjected to threats, kidnapings, and murder, the vast majority of the Americans once in Lebanon have left and those who remain exercise great caution for their safety.

Robert H. Kupperman, an expert on terrorism at Georgetown University's Center for Strategic and International Studies, said in an interview that Reagan made a mistake in promising retaliation and that his current approach is the best one.

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